

EXETER-WEST GREENWICH April 12, 2011

REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

MINUTES

The Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District School Committee held a meeting on this date at 6:00 p.m. in the Exeter-West Greenwich Jr. – Sr. High School Library. Members present were Gregory Coutcher, Chairperson; Teri Maia-Cicero, Vice Chairperson; Valerie Zuercher, Clerk; Mark Rafanelli; Theresa Donovan, Paul McFadden, and Claudine Pande. Superintendent Thomas J. Geismar, Director of Administration Robert V. Ross, (arrived at 6:07 p.m.), and Student Member Matthew French (left at 7:29 p.m.) were present. Attorney Vincent Ragosta arrived at 7:47 p.m.

ORDER – Chair Coutcher called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. There was a moment of silence in memory of Bruce Balch who passed away suddenly over the weekend. Mr. Balch was a long-time custodian for the school district.

Open Forum – None

Presentation – Student Member Report – Student Member Matthew French reported that the school play Cinderella was amazing and very well attended. Student Member French read a statement from the Student Council regarding potential changes to next year's school

calendar. On behalf of students, he thanked the committee for hearing concerns at the last meeting regarding the proposed elimination of February and April vacations from next year's school calendar and expressed appreciation for the work the School Committee does.

Dr. Geismar and Member Zuercher expressed praise for the Cinderella performances and recognized the good work that Student Member French did in his role as the prince.

District Mission Statement – Member Donovan read the District Mission Statement.

Director of Administration Robert Ross arrived at this time, (6:07 p.m.).

Sr. High School Presentation – Assistant Principal Christopher Anthony presented data relating to the senior high school NECAP results. The data compared EWG 2007 - 2010 Mean Math/ELA, Reading, Writing, and Math scores. Assistant Principal Anthony reported that this year EWG scores were well ahead of the state scores in all categories. He outlined curriculum strategies used in preparation for the test and pointed out that this time students took the test under the impression that the scores counted toward graduation. Principal Butler stressed the importance of maintaining student application and commitment to the test and said it will be

challenging not to lose that momentum.

He talked about the reward system for the upcoming science testing and about looking at incentives to demonstrate to students that assessments count. Principal Butler briefly talked about the changes to state assessments that will be coming in 2014 and 2015 and

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said that teachers are aware they need to begin transitioning and are preparing for those changes. Assistant Principal Anthony reported on curriculum strategies, review programs, and exam incentives in place for the upcoming Science NECAP testing. He stated that juniors are engaged and excited about the incentive program. The Science Department believes a good footing is in place to do better this year. Principal Butler reported on the programs and interventions in place for those students that did not reach standards. Other items Principal Butler reported on included Guidance Report, Career Tech Outreach, R.T.I., and Student Activities. Assistant Principal Jim Alves talked about the successes of Student Athletics -RI Interscholastic League. He stated that EWG High School is one of the smallest in the state and its pool of athletes is a lot less than other school districts. The number of successes EWG athletes have achieved this year is astronomical.

2010 Girls Division and State Champions

Boys Soccer Division Champions State Runner-Up

Boys Football State Runner-Up

Girls Volleyball Division and State Champions

Gymnastics Division and State Champions

Wrestling Division Champions

JV Basketball State Champions

Swim Team made it to the Semi-Finals

Parent/School Improvement Team member Mrs. Sullivan gave a brief overview and year-end review on the School Improvement Teams' work this year. In closing, Principal Butler thanked the School Committee for its commitment to the School Community.

Vice Chair Cicero made a motion to move up under New Business item E. Discussion with Board of Canvassers Regarding Absentee Ballots for Next Year. Member Donovan seconded the motion. Voted 7 – 0 in favor. The motion passed.

NEW BUSINESS - Discussion with Board of Canvassers Regarding Absentee Ballots for Next Year – Chair Coutcher stated that the Board of Canvasser (BOC) were invited tonight to consider the feasibility of having absentee ballots for next year's all-day referendum vote. In view of the fact that the budget timeline is short, could the BOC get the application process complete within the timeframe. West Greenwich Town Clerk Janet Olsson stated that she does not think there would be enough time to do mail ballots. Exeter Canvasser Mary B. Hall stated that voters could be informed a couple of months before that absentee ballots would be available and they could apply

for them; however, the key is to have the ballots in advance. West Greenwich Canvasser Holly Howard recommended scheduling a work session for the School Committee and the two BOC to determine what the School Committee would like to achieve, hash out the possibilities, and devise a plan well in advance of next year's all-day referendum. Both BOC are willing to cooperate; however, do not see a way to get the mail ballots out. The timeframe for mail ballots would require the School Committee to modify its budget

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timeline. Chair Coutcher advised that the School Committee would leave it to the BOC to explore alternatives with the Board of Elections. If none are found, the School Committee will move forward without absentee ballots.

Student Member French left the meeting at this time, (7:05 p.m.).

In response to Member McFadden's inquiry, Chair Coutcher said the School Committee would have to seek legal advice if write-in ballots are permissible according to the Charter. Canvasser Howard asked the School Committee to consider changing to a District vote in one location for next year. That would make it easier for the BOC to work together and keep the process uniform. It also makes a strong statement. The vote could still be reported out by town. Chair Coutcher agreed it is a good idea to schedule a School

Committee/Board of Canvassers work session perhaps during the summer.

ROUTINE ITEMS – CONSENT AGENDA- Superintendent Geismar gave an overview of the Consent Agenda. Mr. Ross answered Member Donovan's inquiry regarding consent agenda item B. 3. a. Member Pande requested to pull consent agenda item, B. 7. a. for discussion.

Member Zuercher made a motion to accept the consent agenda with item B. 7. a. pulled. Member Donovan seconded the motion. Voted 7 – 0 in favor.

The following items were approved:

A. Approval of Minutes – Regular Minutes of March 22, 2011

B. Personnel Items

1. Appointments

2. Leaves of Absence

3. Resignations – (As Recommended by the Superintendent, with Regret)

a. Letter of Resignation from Christopher Gillette from his position as 1.0 FTE Senior Computer Technician from the district, effective April 15, 2011

4. Grievances

5. Non-Renewals

6. Recalls

7. Sabbaticals

a. Item Pulled

C. Bills – In the amount of \$267,247.21

D. Home School Approvals

End Consent Agenda

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The School Committee came to a consensus to discuss the sabbatical leave request at this time rather than waiting until the end of the meeting. Dr. Geismar answered Member Pande's concerns regarding how the fiscal impact for the sabbatical leave will affect the district since the School Committee budget did not pass yesterday. Member Pande expressed total support for Mrs. McGrane's quest to further her nursing education.

Member McFadden made a motion to approve a sabbatical leave form Christine McGrane. Clerk Zuercher seconded the motion. Voted 7 – 0 in favor.

The following item was approved:

B. Personnel Items

7. Sabbaticals – (As Recommended by the Superintendent)

a. Request from Christine McGrane for a sabbatical leave from her position as 1.0 FTE School Nurse Teacher at Metcalf School, for first semester in the 2011 – 2012 school year

Correspondence – (1) March 30, 2011 letter from Exeter Juvenile Hearing Board cc: to the School Committee, Regarding Zero Fatalities Program; (2) April 4, 2011 RESOLUTION (Binding Arbitration) of the Smithfield School Committee; (3) April 8, 2011 E-Mail from Attorney B. Gorham to Dr. Geismar Regarding EWGRSD Charter

Members did not voice any questions or concerns regarding Correspondence.

Monthly Budget Projection 2010 – 2011 – Director of Administration Robert Ross reported that the Budget Projection 2010 – 2011 continues to be in very good financial condition.

Budget Update 2011 - 2012 – Dr. Geismar stated that last night's voting results were disappointing. The School Committee and administrative team worked diligently on the budget and were able to get in a strong position moving forward. Great things are going on in the district. It was disappointing that the town carrying quite a bit of a surplus themselves did not step up and give the school district the support it needed. There is nothing left to cut from the school budget. The contract locks the District in and layoff language is very specific. Thirteen percent of staff has been cut in the last four years.

The community should thank the schools, thank teachers for buying their own paper, and thank administrators for not taking raises. The unions have stepped up and helped. No one wants to look at cutting student activities and sports. In the past, the District has had a budget balance as low as \$30,000 and has fought back. Dr. Geismar said he would not make recommendations to take away the good momentum the District is currently experiencing. He recommended putting \$1.2 million into the 2011 - 2012 Budget out of the District surplus.

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Member McFadden stated that the reality is that voters approved a \$29,900,000 budget for next year. The School Committee must plan a budget for that amount and plan a reserve fund to draw from internally. If the reserve fund is exhausted, the School Committee will have to go back to the towns for additional funds. Chair Coutcher agreed and stated that legal counsel has advised that the cash reserve is the District's to spend up and above the \$29,900,000 if needed.

Student Member French returned to and then left the meeting for a second time at 7:29 p.m.

Clerk Zuercher voiced her opinion that the School Committee has a responsibility to the community to ensure that going forward

amendments to the budget are submitted with fidelity and thought. She said she does not object to the amendment process; however, the School Committee needs to amend the charter to allow for responsible, accountable amendments prior to the next all-day referendum vote. Chair Coutcher gave his opinion that amendments should not be allowed. He advised that what Clerk Zuercher is proposing would require a change to the charter. Clerk Zuercher recommended to have the Charter Review Committee investigate that.

Member Donovan added to have it in place for the fall legislative session. Member Pande said she disagrees with amendments. The citizens elected the School Committee to represent their interests in a responsible manner and they trust the School Committee to give children the best schools students can have. The committee cannot do that when \$900,000 has been subtracted from the budget.

A new 2011-2012 Budget Summary was disseminated that Chair Coutcher said came out of a meeting he had today with Dr. Geismar and Mr. Ross. Essentially, it is the same as what Member McFadden has proposed. \$900,000 would come from the cash reserve as needed. Mr. Ross gave an overview of the handout. He said that the key element to the Budget Summary is there are three budget summaries listed on page one: Failed (SC Approved), Passed (Amended), and Alternate.

Attorney Ragosta arrived at this time, (7:47 p.m.).

The Alternate Budget illustrates the School Committees' prerogative to use as much or as little of the District surplus to fund the budget. The school committee could use less of the available fund balance, thereby causing the appropriation to the towns to increase. The \$29,900,000 budget that was passed is an increase of \$500,000 over last year. That \$500,000 could come from the towns. Chair Coutcher explained that the Alternate Budget illustrates what the School Committee could do; however, he does not agree with doing that because that was not the intent of the voters. Mr. Ross reviewed page 2 comparing the Failed Budget to the Amended Budget. Given the \$928,944 reduction to the budget, it would take \$1,780,122 of fund balances to operate at the School Committee approved budget. The concern is that the District is depleting its funds while at the same

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time there is nothing left to cut from the schools. This means the towns are going to have to pay. The District will continue to manage the way it has been by holding spending and using fund balances but after next year, the situation will become difficult. Mr. Ross answered Member Pande's questions about the District's healthcare surplus. The School Committee considered whether to vote to approve the budget this evening. Dr. Geismar pointed out that this item is not on the agenda for a vote. If the committee could get to a consensus, he could bring back a final budget to the next meeting for a vote. Member McFadden pointed out that the mailing circulated by the town

of West Greenwich residents was deceiving. The mailing illustrated what the School Committee should do with the surplus but did not note that the School Committee was not obligated to do that. Member McFadden also noted that he does however believe that the District should work with the towns with an understanding that the District may come back to the towns if necessary should additional funding be necessary. Public audience attendee Mr. Kaltschnee informed the School Committee that West Greenwich Council is obligated to hold a budget hearing next Wednesday for the town if the Financial Meeting is to be held on June 9. To accommodate that the town needs to know the amount of funding needed for the School District prior to that time or it will have to move the Town Financial Meeting under its charter. Member Donovan reiterated what Dr. Geismar said, that the budget is not on the agenda for a vote tonight. Member McFadden proposed to hold a special School Committee meeting prior to next Wednesday. Member Donovan said she is not in support of an emergency meeting. The committee just received the figures this evening. Member Pande agreed to hold a special meeting, however it is important that all seven School Committee members are present at that meeting. Chair Coutcher assessed that consensus of the committee is not to schedule a special meeting. The School Committee does not wish to be rushed through the process. The budget adoption will continue to the next regular meeting agenda.

Monthly Status Reports – Superintendent – Member Donovan asked the Superintendent if the RI School Superintendent Association

(RISSA) executive board discussed parochial school transportation at its April 7 meeting. Dr. Geismar said it was discussed and that issue was referred to a committee for a study. Chair Coutcher advised that he read in the governor's budget that private school textbook reimbursement from the state will probably be cut so that will cost the District more money. In response to Clerk Zuercher's comments, Dr. Geismar said that he would continue to bring the issue forward to RISSA.

Business

Special Education

Maintenance

Technology

NEW BUSINESS – Seek RI Board of Ethics Advisory Regarding School Committee Salaries – Member McFadden requested to have this item on the agenda. He recommended obtaining an advisory from the RI Board of Ethics (RIBOE) regarding the

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School Committee accepting a salary without it appearing on the all-day referendum ballot. Past practice has been that determination of the School Committees' stipend amounts have been a resolution voted on at the District Financial Meeting (DFM). Chair Coutcher stated that he spoke to Mr. Peter Mangione (RIBOE) who advised that it is fine to include the stipends in the operation budget. However, if

the District ever wants to increase the amount it would need to seek an advisory. Member McFadden stated that he would still like to get an advisory in writing. Chair Coutcher said that there is a link on the BOE website. He will send it to Member McFadden if he would like to take the lead on that. Member McFadden said that he would attempt it. However, he would like to have the attorney to do it. Member Pande stated that she does not want the District to have to pay for legal fees. Member McFadden agreed to take care of it.

Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA) Update – Dr. Geismar advised that the Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA) reports have been released. The reports hold a lot of information. Presently the auditors are auditing the full state guidelines to determine consistency among school districts' account charting. Then the report will go to the Auditor General's office. The administrative financial team will continue to monitor that the District is in compliance with UCOA.

Policy Subcommittee Recommendations – Clerk Zuercher made a motion to delete policies 3102, 7401, 7503, 7705, and 8611 as recommended by the policy subcommittee. Seconded by Member Donovan. Voted 7 – 0 in favor. The motion passed.

Policies Review/Adoption – 3201: Annual Budget Process – Amendment – Clerk Zuercher made a motion to approve policy 3201 as amended. Seconded by Member Donovan. Voted 7 – 0 in favor. The motion passed.

Approve Additional Elective English Course; Senior Research paper (.5 credit) –

Principal Butler requested an addendum to the 2011 – 2012 Program of Studies to include an additional elective English course called Research Paper (.5 credit).

Member Rafanelli made a motion to approve Additional Elective English Course; Research Paper. Member Pande seconded the motion. Voted 7 – 0 in favor. The motion passed.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS – Approve 2011 – 2012 School Calendar – Clerk Zuercher made a motion to approve the 2011 – 2012 school calendar, the traditional calendar starting before Labor Day and keeping February and April vacation – draft 1 based on all the reasons we have talked about and heard from kids and parents. Member Donovan seconded the motion.

School Committee members exchanged thoughts about when to make potential changes to the school calendar. The consensus of the School Committee, with the exception of

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Member Pande, was to approve the traditional calendar format for the 2011 – 2012 school year and to readdress a change to a one-week

vacation calendar for the following year. This would allow sufficient time for consideration and to get other district onboard especially Chariho and Coventry where EWG students attend vocational school programs. [Chariho School District has sent a letter that they are considering a one-week March vacation calendar for the 2012 – 2013 school year]. Additionally, to respond to the survey to let parents and teachers know the School Committee appreciates their input and wants to make changes; however, a change for this year is too soon. Member Pande stated that she chooses not to change her vote. The survey results demonstrate that parents want a one-week calendar and teachers want a flow of education calendar. The desire is to have snow days built into the calendar and it is in the best interest of students to have a flow of education calendar. Member Rafanelli proposed scheduling workshops with other districts to organize the calendar. Vice Chair Cicero stated concerns that going forward the survey should be done differently due to flaws allowing individuals to respond more than one time. Member Pande stated that next time there would be a lack of parent feedback according to what she is hearing from parents. In summary, Chair Coutcher stated that the committee would continue to explore changing the school calendar and to engage other district especially Chariho and Coventry Schools. That would solve the financial impact of busing EWG vocational students following a different schedule. Dr. Geismar noted one minor change that needs to be added to the draft 1 calendar is to add that trimesters include Metcalf School.

Chair Coutcher called for a vote on Clerk Zuercher's motion to approve the draft 1 2011 – 2012 calendar, seconded by Member Donovan. Voted 6 – 1 in favor. Member Pande voted no. The motion passed.

SORICO Update – Dr. Geismar reported that at the last SORICO collaborative council meeting, the council voted to no longer run programs and to cease operations pending the sale of the building. Dr. Geismar stated that Attorney Andrew Henneous has submitted four questions he would like answered. Member Pande also submitted questions. School Committee members may email any questions they might have to either Dr. Geismar or Member Rafanelli. Dr. Geismar will work to get the questions answered. Dr. Geismar said he anticipates bringing his recommendation of whether to rescind EWG's letter of withdrawal from SORICO at the next SC meeting.

Policies Review/Adoption – 6255: Managing Personnel Records – Adoption –

8305: Response –When Student is Missing from School - Adoption –

8501: Rights and Responsibilities of Students and Parents - Adoption – Member McFadden requested a moment to review Policy 6255.

Mr. Ross answered Member Donovan's inquiry regarding adding personnel for the ASPEN implementation in view of Mr. Gillette's resignation. Member Donovan

requested administration to ask employees who submit letters of resignations to please sign them.

Clerk Zuercher moved to adopt policies 6255, 8305, and 8501. Member Donovan seconded the motion. Voted 7 – 0 in favor. The motion passed.

Capital Project Update – Dr. Geismar advised that there is a Capital Project Building Committee meeting tomorrow.

Reports/Comments – None

Important Dates and Meetings – Wednesday, April 13, 2011 – Capital Project Building Committee Meeting: Tuesday, April 26, 2011 – School Committee Meeting-(Jr. High Presentation); Tuesday, May 10, 2011 – School Committee-(Lineham/Wawaloam Presentation); Tuesday, May 24, 2011 – School Committee Meeting-(Special Education Presentation)

EXECUTIVE SESSION – RIGL 42-46-4 and RIGL 42-46-5 – Vice Chair Cicero moved to go into Executive Session at 9:03 p.m. in accordance with 42-46-5 (a) (4) – Discussion of Investigative Proceedings

Regarding Allegations of Employee Misconduct; seconded by Clerk Zuercher; and voted as follows:

Gregory Coutcher Yes

Teri Cicero Yes

Valerie Zuercher Yes

Mark Rafanelli Yes

Theresa Donovan Yes

Paul McFadden Yes

Claudine Pande Yes

Meeting recessed to Executive Session at 9:13 p.m.

Member McFadden left Executive Session at 9:50 p.m.

Clerk Zuercher left Executive Session at 9:52 p.m.

Vice Chair Cicero moved to reconvene to Open Session. Member Rafanelli seconded the motion. Voted 5 – 0 in favor. Meeting reconvened to Open Session at 10:17 p.m.

No votes were taken during Executive Session.

Adjournment – Vice Chair Cicero moved to adjourn at 10:17 p.m. Member Rafanelli seconded the motion. Voted 5 – 0 in favor. Meeting adjourned at 10:17 p.m.

ROBIN CERIO

CLERK